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Mozambique escape a 'national disgrace'

The escape from prison of a man charged with murdering Mozambique's leading journalist was "a body blow to our judicial system", according to the country's attorney general.

Joaquim Madeira said that it was "a national disgrace" and he disclosed that a commission of inquiry had been set up, the Mozambican Information Agency AIM reported.

" Impunity is the worst ill that can exist. Impunity for any crime leads to other crimes. "

Attorney General Joaquim Madeira

Anibal Antonio dos Santos Junior, known as Anibalzinho, escaped from prison on Sunday, despite warnings from the police of a possible bid for freedom.

He was one of six men held in prison and accused of murdering Carlos Cardoso, the editor of the Metical newspaper, in November 2000 while he was investigating a major corruption case at the Commercial Bank of Mozambique.

The newspaper editor was killed outside his newspaper office in Maputo by a group of gunmen, who blocked his escape with two cars and then shot him repeatedly.

In the last year, the attorney general and the Mozambican president have criticised the judicial and police authorities repeatedly for corruption and incompetence.

Impunity leads to crime

Just before the escape, a former officer of the Criminal Investigation Police (PIC) warned Interior Minister Almerino Manhenje that Anibalzinho and another of the accused would attempt to escape in the near future, according to AIM.

One member of the PIC was cited by AIM as saying: "Everything was done at the highest level to facilitate the escape and make a trial in the Carlos Cardoso case impossible."

The attorney general said the escape showed that "the system is really sick".

"Impunity is the worst ill that can exist. Impunity for any crime leads to other crimes.

"This is serious. Very, very serious," he said on Tuesday.

After news of the escape was made public, dozens of people were said to have gathered at the site of the murder and placed flowers there.

Fighting corruption

Attorney General Joaquim Madeira has been fiercely critical of the police and judicial authorities for corruption.

In March he said that the entire Mozambican legal system was plagued by incompetence, corruption and the abuse of power.

Three months earlier, President Joaquim Chissano sacked two police chiefs over their failure to stem a growth in violent crime.

The president said that citizens had lost confidence in the police.

The murdered journalist, Carlos Cardoso, had gained a reputation as an opponent of corruption.

At the time of his death he was investigating a case of fraud in which \$14m disappeared from the Central Bank of Mozambique.

Six men were charged with his murder in May 2001 but have not been brought to court.

Among those charged are a prominent businessman, Ayob Abdul Satar, and a former bank manager, Vicente Ramaya.

They are accused of taking out a contract to have Mr Cardoso killed.

Anibalzinho was one of the four men charged with carrying out the killing.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/low/africa/2234056.stm>